

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

**Israel Klein
or Jeff Duncan
(202) 225-2836**

September 3, 2003

**Prepared Opening Statement of Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
Energy and Commerce Hearing: "Blackout 2003: How Did it Happen and Why?"
Wednesday, September 3, 2003**

Thank you.

Our constituents want to know what caused the August 14th blackout, and what is being doing to prevent it from happening again. While I understand that it may take some time to determine what changes in electric utility industry policies and practices, or in federal utility regulations might be needed to prevent a repetition of the events of August 14th, it is not unreasonable for the American people to expect our nation's energy regulators to explain what caused the blackout to occur in the first place and how it spread so quickly. Unfortunately, from what I can see in the prepared testimony submitted to the Committee by the Department of Energy and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Bush Administration remains in the dark about the causes of the blackout.

At the same time, the Bush Administration continues to press for the immediate adoption of an energy bill that contains language that would make sweeping deregulatory changes in electricity law and launch a wide-ranging assault on our environment in the name of increasing oil and gas production. The Administration is essentially saying that these radical proposals are needed to prevent the recurrence of an event whose causes they say remain unknown. But if we don't know what caused the blackout in the first place, how can we know whether the proposed cure is worse than the disease? That's like a doctor telling you he has no idea what caused you to black out, but he'd like to see you in the morning for brain surgery. When you hear that, you know it's time to get a second opinion.

That is why I support Rep. Dingell's proposal to move a narrowly focused bill enacting electricity reliability standards now. It may not solve the problems we don't know about yet, but it deals with a problem we have known about for years – that current reliability standards are voluntary and therefore totally unenforceable. Let's make standards enforceable now, so that when we finally find out what caused the problem, the regulators will have the authority needed to fix it.

But everything else is either unrelated to the blackout or a shot in the dark.

Oil is for cars and trucks, not for air conditioners, refrigerators, ovens or light bulbs. Only about 3 percent of the oil our nation consumes is used for electricity.

What stopped working during the blackout? Our lights, our cooling, our refrigerators, our ovens.

Our cars and SUVs ran just fine.

It is ridiculous to use the blackout as an argument for drilling in the Arctic Refuge and other pristine public lands, and it exposes those who make the argument as desperate for an outcome driven by ideology, not facts.

The only relationship between the electricity blackout and gasoline is that several refineries shut down temporarily, which the oil industry used as an excuse to raise the price of gasoline to record-breaking levels nationwide over the Labor Day weekend.

I don't think that was justified, but at least the relationship is clear -- electricity doesn't depend on reliable oil -- oil depends on reliable electricity.

That is why we should stop searching in Alaska for solutions to the blackout. The problem is not in Alaska, it is in Ohio. The solutions won't be found above the Arctic Circle, but below Lake Erie.

I don't think we should be satisfied with the "we'll get back to you later" response that I see in the prepared statements submitted to the Committee yesterday. This \$7-10 billion dollar hit to the economy could happen again tomorrow. The American people have a right to know what caused the blackout, and whom should be held accountable for the resulting inconvenience and economic disruption.

We have a right to know what FirstEnergy, AEP and other utilities companies did or did not do on August 14th, whether their actions or omissions caused the blackout to occur or to spread, what their neighboring utilities did or failed to do in response, and what new safeguards they are, or should be, adopting to prevent a reoccurrence.

I look forward to hearing the testimony.

For more information, please go to www.house.gov/markey.

#